

off the Prophet's head after he was murdered at Carthage.³⁰ The fiend of Carthage prison was dead, and Joseph and those who had witnessed his death couldn't help but think, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!"

Meanwhile the great Nauvoo temple was completed, and Joseph helped guard it while howling mobs swore to tear it down. Even though their world seemed to be coming apart, Joseph and his family continued to labor in the work of the Lord. On January 25th, 1845 Joseph's brother John Deans Murdock married Mary Jane Norris in the new Nauvoo temple. We know not what, if anything, happened to Jeanette Risell, according to Joseph's journal the girl John Deans married at New York.

But an even stranger mystery was in the making, for John's new wife had a brother in New York State, Benny Norris, then only 7 years old, who came with his parents to Nauvoo to be with his sister. His father, David Norris, was a blacksmith at Nauvoo, and during the fighting there in September, 1846 he was killed while defending the city from the mobs who were burning it. Mrs. Norris died during the exodus from Nauvoo, leaving poor Benny to fend for himself, since his sister and her husband John Deans had already fled the burning city.

Young Benny Norris became just another of the homeless thousands wandering hungry and alone on the frozen prairie. But he knew his sister had moved west, and somehow he set out to find her, and against all odds he succeeded. The story of Benny Norris and his life with the Murdocks was destined to be as strange a tale as any ever heard on the frontier.

30. Diary of Peter Conover, Utah State Historical Society, and The Carthage Conspiracy, Pg. 195, Dallin Oaks, University of Illinois Press, 1975.

Chapter Three

Exodus: The Ordeal At Winter Quarters

Nauvoo was in flames. Mobs ran through the streets breaking windows and burning houses. For days a steady line of wagons made their way to the river as the city's population fled into the wilderness. Brigham Young had agreed to vacate the city by the summer of 1846, but still the crazed mobocrats weren't satisfied and began to drive the Saints onto the frozen prairie in the dead of winter. The carnage and destruction sickened even the most hard-hearted. Major W.B. Warren of Governor Ford's own militia reported a scene so base that he resigned his commission in disgust. *"A man near 60 years of age was dragged from his home, stripped of his clothing and his back cut to ribbons with a whip, for no other reason than that he was a Mormon, and too old and sick to make successful resistance. Conduct of this kind would disgrace a hoard of savages."*¹

Joseph took his large wagon and his mother's one horse shay to Webb's Blacksmith Shop to have the wheels tightened before crossing the Mississippi. It was early February, 1846 and the river was choked with floating ice. Ferry boats carried wagons across at great risk, while many head of livestock were drowned and lost. Both Joseph and his brother John risked their lives daily, returning time and again to help the homeless thousands. Joseph had been charged with getting the large herd of church-owned livestock across the river. In his journal, Joseph tells how he got one wild steer across in a boat. *"While crossing the Mississippi one of the brethren had a sick steer that they couldn't keep on their boat. I told them to drive him on and I would hold him. They drove the steer on at full speed and I caught him by the nose with one hand and with my other arm around his neck I threw and held him until they could rope and tie it to the boat."*²

John Deans also labored long hours in the icy water, getting thousands of head of sheep, cattle, and horses across, as well as helping many of the Saints who couldn't help themselves. Exhausted, sick and nearly frozen from being in the icy water day after day, he caught pneumonia and died alone in the night

1. The Mormon Trek West, Pg. 65, Joseph Brown, Doubleday, 1980.

2. Journal JSM.

among the cattle and horses he had risked his life to save. He left his young wife of only one month and a grieving family, still mourning the loss of their husband and father. Joseph was heartbroken over the loss of his brother, for they had been close chums, only two years apart in age.

John Deans Murdock was buried in an unmarked Indian grave where Col. Thomas Kane, lifelong friend of the Mormons, had apparently for scientific reasons exhumed an Indian skeleton not long before. Joseph wrote, "*We went to the cold springs near Sarpe's Point, where my brother John was buried in an Indian grave where Col. Kane had taken up an Indian skeleton.*"³ It was the first Mormon burial west of the Mississippi. It wouldn't be the last, for the bitter trail of tears across Iowa would be marked with countless graves.

The frozen soil of Iowa was stained red with blood as the bone-weary Saints established a crude camp at Sugar Creek, only 9 miles from the Mississippi. Joseph's friend Hosea Stout described a scene typical of many families there. Two of Stout's small sons had already died of "*black canker*" and scurvy in his arms, and his wife Louisa was near death. "*I cannot attempt to express my feelings. Louisa is unable to get about and I have fearful foreboding of coming events. We are truly desolate and afflicted, and entirely destitute of anything to eat, much less nourish the sick.*"⁴

Oxen's hoofs were split and bleeding, while many of the Saints had no shoes and stumbled along barefoot through the ice and snow. Eliza Snow, sister of Lorenzo Snow and a noted poet of her day later recalled how the women suffered in silence. "*The sisters walked all day, and at night prepared supper for their families, with no sheltering tents, and then make their beds under wagons. Forgetting her own fatigue and destitution, she took pains to fix up in the most palatable form their allotted portion of food.*"⁵

The exodus across the Mississippi and into the frozen wilderness was especially hard for Sally Murdock. She had lost nearly everything of value she owned, and was 67 years old with only her 12 year old son Nymphus to help her, now that both her husband and son John were dead. She had to drive her own

3. Ibid.

4. The Gathering of Zion, Pg. 60, Wallace Stegner, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

5. The Mormon Trek West, Pg. 8, Joseph Brown, Doubleday, 1980.

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little wagon, for Joseph had his own wagon to drive and wife to care for, as well as trying to help others in need. And he had to care for his own livestock as well as that owned by the church.

During one bitterly cold night two of Joseph's oxen fell exhausted and froze to death. It was a disastrous loss for him, for without the oxen he could not move on. A band of Indians had been following the straggling wagon train, stealing whatever the Saints lost along the way. Joseph had a feeling that he could trade something to the Indians for an ox, but he had little to trade. In his journal Joseph tells that he asked his wife Eunice what they could spare, and she said that she had a piece of dress material in her chest. Joseph wrote, *"I took the cloth and a peck of corn and set out to get an ox. I found several Indians who had an ox, and I thought the trade was made, when one of them suddenly pointed to my shirt, so I went back to camp without a shirt, but I had an ox."*⁶

How Joseph obtained his second ox is an example of his honesty and willingness to do unto others as he would have them do unto him. It is best described in his own words. *"Several days before my ox died, about 4 miles past Sarpe's Point, I had seen several stray oxen, and after we made camp I started back after them. I walked about 6 miles and was driving them back to camp when it became dark and I got lost. I found some high grass and pulled it up and made my bed for the night. I had a sheep skin over my shoulders but no coat or vest, and I dreamed of buffalo robes, for it was very cold. The wolves howled and I thought of camp.. When the stars came out I knew where I was and started driving the oxen to camp and got there at sun-up. I learned that the oxen belonged to Brother John Taylor, so Brother George Q. Cannon and I delivered them to him without price, and it was alright."*⁷ He had risked his life for two oxen and then willingly gave them up to their rightful owner. John Taylor later became president of the church while George Q. Cannon was First Counsellor to President Wilford Woodruff. Both were life long friends of Joseph.

Joseph's service to John Taylor was mysteriously and perhaps miraculously repaid a few days later. *"I was sitting on the ground trying to think how to get another ox when an old man rode up to me on his horse and said, 'Take this horse and saddle over by the river and trade them for what you can get.' I said*

6. Journal, JSM.

7. Ibid.